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*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 06SANJOSE443, BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON OSCAR ARIAS

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06SANJOSE443**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">06SANJOSE443</a>	<a href="#">2006-02-24 20:58</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy San Jose</a>

Appears in these articles:

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2016  
TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CS](#)  
SUBJECT: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON OSCAR ARIAS

¶1. (U) Oscar Arias Sanchez was elected on February 5, 2006, as the first repeat president in Costa Rica since 1970. Winning by a 1.12 percent margin (18,000 votes out of 1.62 million cast), Arias comes to office without the sweeping mandate he expected. He was permitted to run for president because of a controversial 2003 Supreme Court ruling that overturned a ban on reelection. Arias's enemies consider his reelection to be illegitimate. Fiercely independent, patriotic, egotistical and idealistic, Arias will face enormous economic challenges as he attempts to reverse the damage done by years of ineffective governance. He will assume office on May 8, 2006, and is clearly looking forward to returning to the international stage where he will pursue a "moralistic" foreign policy. Arias speaks fluent English.

#### Upbringing

¶2. (U) Arias was born into one of Costa Rica's wealthiest coffee-producing families on September 13, 1940, in the town of Heredia, near San Jose. The Arias family had been heavily involved in politics for several generations at the Cabinet and Legislative Assembly level. Arias attended a public primary school and then attended a private high school (Saint Francis). He briefly enrolled at Boston University where he intended to study medicine but instead returned home to study law and economics at the University of Costa Rica, receiving a bachelor's degree in 1966. At the university, Arias began his life-long involvement with the National Liberation Party (PLN). Arias continued his studies in England at the University of Essex and the London School of Economics. His graduate thesis, "Pressure Groups in Costa Rica," earned him the 1971 National Essay Prize. In 1974, he received a doctoral degree in Political Science at the University of Essex. While in England, Arias participated in protests outside the U.S. Embassy against the Vietnam War.

¶3. (U) Arias taught political science at the University of Costa Rica and married Margarita Penon on April 27, 1972. They had two children (Sylvia Eugenia born in 1975, and Oscar Felipe born 1979) before divorcing in 1990. Due to his rising status within the PLN and work in the third successful presidential campaign of Jose Figueres, Arias was offered the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy in 1972--a post he retained under the Oduber Administration until stepping down in 1977 to run successfully for a seat in Congress in 1978. Arias became Secretary General of the PLN in 1981. In 1986, Oscar Arias was elected to his first term as president of Costa Rica.

¶4. (U) In 1987, President Arias drafted a peace plan to end Central America's multiple armed conflicts. Widely recognized as the Arias Peace Plan, his initiative culminated in the signing of the Esquipulas II Accords by all the Central American presidents on August 7, 1987. In that same year he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1988, Arias used the monetary award from the prize to establish the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress. Under the auspices of the Foundation, three programs were established: The Center for Human Progress to promote equal opportunities for women in Central America; the Center for Organized Participation to foster change-oriented philanthropy in Latin America; and the Center for Peace and Reconciliation to work for demilitarization and conflict resolution in the developing world.

#### Family

¶5. (C) Arias relies heavily on his brother, Rodrigo, who managed his campaign and is the only person who has faithfully remained at his side since he left office 16 years ago. The brothers are often referred to as one unit, "Los Arias," even by the likes of Laura Chinchilla, who shared the ticket with Oscar, and by many of Oscar's handpicked candidates for the Legislative Assembly. The brothers take pride in never disclosing differences. According to Rodrigo,

their only difference is that he is more patient and conciliatory whereas Oscar is more aggressive. A campaign insider summed up the relationship as, "Oscar reigns and Rodrigo governs." In a recent interview, Oscar called himself a dreamer while his brother is the one who "gets things done." (In the same interview, Oscar claimed that he and Rodrigo had much in common with JFK and Robert Kennedy.) Rodrigo will serve as Minister of the Presidency which is similar to Chief of Staff but with control of the intelligence service. This was the only cabinet-level appointment Oscar would acknowledge before the elections. According to one well informed source, Oscar's dependence on his brother has grown significantly since the death of his mother and his divorce deprived him of the constant protection and encouragement he seems to require.

¶6. (C) Arias's famously bitter divorce from Penon has apparently become less bitter over the years. He now speaks highly of her, and she says they have a cordial relationship. Nevertheless, she supported Otton Solis, Arias's political opponent, for president. Arias is very proud of his son whom recently graduated summa cum laude from Harvard and is now studying at the London School of Economics. He also claims to have a close relationship with his daughter.

#### Personality

¶7. (C) Though intelligent and literate, Arias has always been socially awkward and uncomfortable making public appearances. He is the antithesis of the gregarious and back-slapping politician. We suspect he is happiest thinking deep thoughts in his library/study or plotting political strategy alone with his brother. A self-described nerd, he loves books and opera. While waiting for election results, he said he read Dostoevsky. His heroes include Churchill and Mother Teresa. If not a politician, he said he would have like to have been a poet, violinist, or pianist.

¶8. (U) Asthmatic from birth, Arias has publicly acknowledged that his personality reflects his mother's constant concern for his health. Arias has said that he grew up "reading books and wearing sweaters rather than playing football with other children." Since childhood, his ambition was to become president. Arias's daughter and members of his previous cabinet describe him as persistent, ambitious, idealistic, cultured, but perfectionist and arrogant. He has low tolerance for those he believes are talking nonsense or wasting his time.

¶9. (C) Arias has the voice and movements of a man much older than his 65 years. He often slouches when sitting and is unexpressive. He is slow to respond to questions. What he says seems to be carefully measured. He sometimes exhibits wry and even self-deprecating humor, but with a thin smile, not a laugh. He often refers to his Nobel Prize and his many honorary doctorate degrees. He is also a notorious name-dropper and loves to be linked to the rich and famous, e.g., Jane Fonda, Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Whoopi Goldberg, the entire Kennedy family, John Kerry, Felipe Gonzalez, and fellow Nobel laureates. Despite his phlegmatic and lugubrious bearing, Arias enjoys a reputation as a lady's man.

#### Attitude Towards the United States

¶10. (C) Arias is both an admirer and critic of the United States. He travels frequently to the United States and has many contacts there in government, academia, and NGOs, as well as personal friends. He speaks frankly to USG interlocutors and does not hesitate to criticize U.S. foreign policy. His most frequent criticisms concern U.S. "unilateralism," the "unacceptable and illegal doctrine of preemptive war," U.S. opposition to wholesale disarmament, and insufficient generosity to developing countries. On the other hand, he approves of U.S. efforts to negotiate free trade agreements that provide developing countries with greater access to the U.S. market. He calls himself a "fierce believer" in the importance of a strong private

sector and foreign investment in order to generate employment. Regarding his friendship with several prominent Democrats in the U.S. Congress, he expressed disappointment to us about their position on CAFTA: "They supported my peace accords because they were against Reagan. Now they don't support CAFTA because they are against Bush."

#### Wealth

11. (U) In the wake of the 2004 corruption scandals that eventually tainted all Costa Rican ex-presidents since Arias, many voters seemed attracted to Arias because he presumably has no need to steal public funds and apparently did not do so last time he was President. Arias's enemies searched diligently for evidence of corruption throughout the campaign without success. In addition to coffee, the Arias family has large holdings in several sugar plantations and a sugar refinery (El Tabagon). Arias's personal wealth lies in his investment portfolio, the true value of which is unknown. Arias resigned from the board of Grupo Sama, a major investment firm, before launching his campaign, but still owns 14.75 percent of the firm. Arias also owns stock in a number of other investment firms according to the campaign declaration he was required to file with the Comptroller General's office. These firms are: Adral Corporation (100 percent), Inversiones La Lillyana (33.3 percent), Montaras del Norte (33.3 percent), and Futuros Oras (50 percent). Futuros Oras currently holds an investment account with Morgan Stanley worth USD 579,000 according to Arias's declaration. Missing, however, from the declaration is the value of Arias's house, a local landmark near the U.S. Embassy. Arias receives roughly USD 2,650 per month in pension payments plus a dividend of USD 40,000 per year from his investment in El Tabagon.

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